Shaun Kendall

Chapter 10: Author’s Chair

Tom Sawyer

Mark Twain

**Does the book tell a good story?**

*Tom Sawyer* is an American classic that tells a tale of growing up as a young boy in the American South during the age of slavery. While primarily a tale of adventure of the main character and his friend, Huck Finn, it does provide a historically accurate picture of life in the South, at least for a certain class of people.

**Is the story accurate and authentic in its historical detail, including the setting and the known events of history?**

Yes. It is very authentic, from its description of paddle boats which were vital to trade and commerce along the Mississippi, to its description of the importance of church in small town life. The church scene and sermon is important as it lets people see how people viewed the government of America and the tyrants and Oriental despots who were seen as a threat to be overcome. In its description of school life and the use of corporal punishment in a one-room school house, it is easy to see how the education system itself has changed along with the methods of learning.

**Is the language authentic to the times?**

Yes, the language is very authentic. Even the use of words that today are seen as pejoratives, the everyday usage of these words in the book illustrate the idea that racism and being a member of a non-white racial group was reason enough to be cast as a villain or a simpleton, but not the hero.

**Is the historical interpretation sound?**

The historical interpretation is not especially sound. While touching upon key points that can be used to teach about society in the South during this time frame, it is in the end, a book about a young boy growing up, not a documentary.

**Whose voices are missing?**

There are many voices missing from *Tom Sawyer*. Some of these voice are women, Native Americans, African-Americans, both free and slave. For these reasons, it would be a wise idea to have other books supplementing this book that contain alternative narratives of this time.

**Does the book provide insight and understanding into current issues as well as those in the past?**

Yes, I feel this book does provide insight into current events. One of the ways this can be done is to address racism and how it was an integral part of American culture and how it reverberates to today. When discussing the use of a common slang word used by African Americans today that is considered off-limits for others to use, the common outcry is “Why is it acceptable for them to use it, but not me?” While not defending its use at all, the casual usage and the way it was used by white people can be shown to be ample reason why it is not acceptable for use today. The manner in which it was used was not one of love or affection, but rather one of superiority or degradation.